



PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

October 31-November 15, 2008

GENDER DEVELOPMENT

Afghan Women Unite at the First Women's Council: In October, 2008, nearly 500 women from all corners of Afghanistan converged on Kabul for the first National Women's Council. This milestone event was the first time in recent history that women from across the country had the opportunity to confer with each other about the issues that most affect their lives.

Women from 33 of the 34 Afghan provinces were in attendance. Participants included high-level government representatives and female professionals working in health, education, business, religion, agriculture, media, the judiciary, security, science and technology, and the arts. These women represented all socio-economic classes, ethnic and age groups, and levels of education and literacy.



More than 500 women from every walk of life attended the council.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



The council provided women an opportunity to voice their concerns to President Karzai.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Over the two-day council, participants developed a list of priorities in each of six critical areas: (1) security; (2) legal protection and human rights; (3) leadership and political participation; (4) economy, work and poverty; (5) health; and (6) education. They ranked their most urgent needs using *The National Action Plan for the Women of Afghanistan* as a framework. The *National Action Plan* is the official strategy for empowering women and advancing gender equality. The Council submitted a Declaration of their priorities to President Karzai, who attended the council on the second day.

The Ministry of Women's Affairs is encouraging the government, civil society, and the donor community to address the Council's recommendations and will monitor their responses. This event not only provided the women of Afghanistan a chance to voice their needs, but helped established collaborative relationships to ensure increasing awareness of the important role women play in peace, security and development.



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DEMOCRACY & GOVERNANCE



Women voting in Afghanistan's 2004 elections.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Afghanistan's First Conference on Elections and Islam held in Kabul:

On November 2nd, USAID supported Afghanistan's first conference to discuss elections and Islam. This important event gave Islamic scholars and government leaders an opportunity to work together to strengthen democracy. The conference was attended by representatives from government ministries, including the Minister of Hajj and Islamic Affairs and the Head of Independent Elections Commission, as well as more than 400 mullahs from around Kabul province.

Participants openly discussed elections, Islam and role of Muslims in voting. Professor Sharani, the Minister of Hajj, stated that Sharia Law orders Muslims to justice and service, and urged Muslims to take part in the electoral process and upcoming Afghan elections. At the end of the conference, the minister prepared and delivered a statement with seven key points on Islam and elections, detailing the rights and obligations of Afghans to vote for their leaders. The statement was well received and later accepted by all participants. Open discussions such as these serve to strengthen Afghanistan's electoral process and help establish a Sharia-compliant approach to government participation.



Twenty judges participated in the two-week Criminal Justice Program in Kabul.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Judges Gain Knowledge to Convict Criminals:

Many judges in Afghanistan have never received specific trainings on Afghanistan's criminal laws. On October 25, 2008, USAID supported a two-week Criminal Justice Program which drew 20 judges from southern and eastern Afghanistan. The judges received training using USAID-developed materials on Afghan Constitutional Law; Penal Law; Criminal Procedure; and Special Criminal Laws, such as anti-corruption, anti-money laundering, counter-narcotics, and crimes against internal and external security.

This training was the second of three Criminal Justice Programs which are taking place around Afghanistan. Trainings like these equip judges with the knowledge to make sound, constitutional decisions on criminal cases, inspiring confidence in Afghanistan's justice system.



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ECONOMIC GROWTH

International Carpet Fair Helps Revive Afghanistan's Carpet Sector: Afghanistan has a long and rich carpet-weaving tradition. Provinces such as Herat, Kunduz, and Balkh remain internationally known for their beautiful, high-quality rugs. To assist Afghan carpet weavers in promoting their unique products, USAID supported the 2nd Kabul International Carpet Fair at Kabul's historic Babur Gardens. Together with the Export Promotion Agency of Afghanistan, the German Technical Cooperation and Standard Charter Bank, USAID helped lead this event which attracted more than 90 carpet dealers from nine Afghan provinces. Vendors showcased their best products to rug importers and investors from around the world. Customers, recognizing the value of the carpets, purchased nearly \$2 million worth of goods at the fair. The event also gave Afghan carpet vendors the opportunity to build new relationships with national and international customers, laying the foundation for future growth. Supporting trade fairs such as this is an integral part of USAID's efforts to link Afghan producers to customers both domestically and abroad.



Women's associations displayed their products at the International Carpet Fair.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

Afghanistan's Central Bank Expands Services: For many years, Afghanistan badly needed better banking services to collect government revenue, pay salaries, and fund development programs. Today, with technical assistance from USAID, the situation is improving. On October 19th, Afghanistan's Central Bank opened two more offices, bringing the total number of modernized branches in Afghanistan to 16, including nine in provincial capitals. These branches will provide efficient, reliable financial services, including funds transfer to pay the salaries of government employees such as teachers, nurses and election workers. In addition, with the help of USAID advisors, the bank can now manage the nation's customs operations, a significant source of revenue for the government of Afghanistan.



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Salt Production Company Helps Create Jobs with a New Loan:

With the promise of a \$50,000 loan from the USAID-supported Afghanistan Rural Finance Company, the Omid Kabul Company plans to do much more than just sell salt. The locally owned salt production business will create over 100 new jobs, a better business infrastructure, and provide villages in seven provinces with iodized salt that will decrease dental disease and blindness in small children. Managers of the Omid Kabul Company plan to use the funds to purchase new salt packaging equipment, better transportation and storage, and expand operations from Kabul to Bamyan, Ghazni, Herat, Kunduz, Paktya, and Wardak provinces, all poor, underdeveloped and undernourished areas. In addition to creating employment opportunities and improving access to healthy products, USAID loans such as these encourage ambitious entrepreneurs to build legal businesses, resulting in a legitimate economy and stable business environment.



Workers producing salt at the Omid Kabul Company. The new loan will create new jobs and expand their services across the country.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

ALTERNATIVE DEVELOPMENT AND AGRICULTURE



Ambassador Wood speaks with veterinarians on the grounds of the new Badakshan Veterinary Clinic.

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan

U.S. Ambassador Wood Inaugurates new Veterinary Clinic in Northern Afghanistan:

In Afghanistan's northern Badakshan province, many villagers rely on their livestock to sustain them through long winters and a harsh climate. The province's steep valley walls make farming difficult, and for thousands of years herders here have raised flocks of sheep, goats and cattle to support their communities.

To strengthen the health and production of these life-sustaining herds, Ambassador William Wood, joined by Badakshan Governor Monshi Mahid and provincial and district officials, inaugurated a new Provincial Veterinary Center

in the capital city, Faizabad. This new facility will not only be an important resource for



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Badakshan's 500,000 animals, but will also serve the more than one million animals from neighboring areas which graze in the area's rich pasturelands every year. The center will provide examination rooms, a quarantine space for investigating disease, and a cold-storage center for preserving vaccines. It will also give veterinarians the tools to process blood samples. When completed, the clinic will equip the people of Badakshan to better care for their animals and ensure that they benefit from stable and profitable livelihoods for years to come.

Outbreak Contained in Herat Province: Herat Province recently experienced an outbreak of a deadly tick-borne virus known as Crimean Congo Hemorrhagic Fever, threatening the health of the province's villagers and their livestock. After 16 cases of the disease were identified and three human deaths, the province's governor turned to USAID for help. Through its Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program, USAID responded rapidly and effectively to the crisis, treating 4,300 animals and spraying 300 animal houses to control ticks in the environment. USAID also participated in prevention campaigns on television and radio to educate the public on exposure to ticks and encourage proper protection when slaughtering animals. Since USAID intervened, there has only been one suspected case of the disease, which is now considered to be under control.

PROVINCIAL RECONSTRUCTION TEAMS

USAID leads a Media Tour of Helmand's Kajaki Dam: On October 28, USAID provided both Afghan and international media the opportunity to visit Helmand province's Kajaki Dam. The dam project recently reached a significant milestone with the delivery of two transformers which, once installed, will significantly improve energy in Helmand's provincial capital, Lashkar Gah.

This tour was the media's first visit to the turbine since Afghan and Coalition troops delivered the transformers in August of 2008. Helmand Governor Ghulab Mangal travelled from Lashkar Gah to Kajaki to meet the visiting media, which included Tolo TV, Shamshad TV, Radio Azadi, the Associated Press and The New York Times. Coverage in nearly every major Afghan media outlet provided Afghans fresh insight into their country's progress.



Kajaki engineers explain to journalists how the new turbines will function

PHOTO: USAID/Afghanistan



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Isolated Villagers Gain New Practical Skills: Afghans from six remote villages in Nangarhar province arrived recently in the provincial capital, Jalalabad City, to learn new skills. Each student will study one of six professional trades that will help them earn a living and provide for their families. To ensure the student's relatives do not suffer without income while they are away, USAID, in partnership with the World Food Programme, has distributed three months worth of food to the family of each student.

The 150 students, selected to attend the courses by their district governors, will each take a three-month practical course in carpentry, masonry, plumbing, painting, electrical skills, or steel skills. The students will also undertake an intensive one week class in business planning to prepare them for the rigors of working for a business or, eventually, even or starting their own. USAID will also support a job fair at the end of the course to assist students in finding employment. When completed, each trained student will be empowered with the knowledge and tools they need to safely rebuild their communities.